

Running Head: EFFECTS OF ATTACHMENT ON ADJUSTMENT AND FRIENDSHIP

Effects of Parent-Child Attachment on Social Adjustment
and Friendship in Young Adulthood

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Attachment is a process that begins early in a person's life, many believe even in an infant's first moments in the world. This process has been defined as the emotional link that forms between a child and a caregiver, and it is thought to physically bind people over time (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1992). Research done by Bowlby (1969) has shown that there are a number of different adaptive and non-adaptive parent-child attachment patterns. Ainsworth (1979) later took a further look into the issue of secure and insecure attachment patterns and found that the quality of early parent-child attachments, as measured using her Strange Situation assessment, has predicted aspects of children's functioning many years down the line.

With this in mind, throughout the years many researchers have conducted studies looking into attachment theory and the long term effects of secure and insecure parent-child attachment patterns in people's lives. My interest in the topic was peaked after working with a young child in foster care who had a great deal of difficulty forming relationships with the people around her. This child had never had the chance to form a secure attachment with a caregiver early in life, and her case worker believed this was part of the reason she struggled with relationships. After working with this child, I began to wonder just how much early attachment patterns truly affected people later in life, particularly their abilities to form and maintain friendships and/or peer relationships.

While working with this child was originally what encouraged me to expand my knowledge of attachment theory, completing research in this area will allow me to do more than just fulfill a personal desire to learn about the long term effects of early attachments. The

knowledge I gain from completing this research will also be beneficial to me in the future. My career goal is to become a Marriage and Family Therapist, and knowing how attachment patterns affect people throughout their lives will be useful when conducting therapy with families and couples.

Due to my personal interest in attachment theory and its far reaching effects, this paper will provide an overview of the research that has been conducted on attachment theory and parent-child attachments, and will show how these early attachment patterns can affect people later in life, particularly in young adulthood. Specifically, this paper will seek to show how early parent-child attachments can affect children's functioning later in life by exploring how they affect social adjustment, well-being, friendships and peer relationships during young adulthood.

Chapter 2

Attachment Theory

While working with delinquent, orphaned and homeless children for the World Health Organization in the 1950s, attachment theory pioneer, John Bowlby (1988), became fascinated with the way that children often showed distress when separated from those closest to them. After working with these children, Bowlby remained intrigued with attachment behaviors and developed attachment theory as a way to better explain “attachment behavior...and the enduring attachments that children and other individuals make to particular others” (p. 29). His milestone research on this subject was first published in a three volume work, *Attachment and Loss* (1969), and his work on this topic was just the beginning of the plethora of research that now exists on the subject of attachment.

Bowlby’s (1969) original work on attachment focused on understanding the “lasting psychological connectedness” (p. 194) that ties an infant to his or her mother-figure, as mothers were generally the ones fulfilling the role of primary caregiver for infants, and were therefore usually the ones infants first became attached to. Bowlby found that within the first year of life, most infants develop a strong bond to their mother figure, which is shown in the way the infant responds to his or her mother as compared to other people (Bowlby, 1982). He discovered that even at three-months old, most infants would already be responding differently to their mothers, and within their first year most infants would further display their attachment to their mother figures in a number of ways. For example, by age one, children will show recognition of their mothers, will vocalize and smile more readily for them, will follow them longer with their eyes,

and will “behave in a way that maintains their proximity to the mother figure” (Bowlby, 1982, p. 199).

Through his work on attachment, Bowlby (1969) came to believe that the early attachments children form with their caregivers have a great impact on children later in their lives. He discovered that the way adults parented their children, whether it be adaptive or maladaptive, affected how children attached to their parents, and ultimately to people later in life as well. If parents were responsive to their children’s needs and consistently showed care for them, then children were likely to form secure parent-child attachments and this pattern of secure attachment was likely to follow them through life. However, if parents responded inconsistently to their children’s needs, their children were likely to learn that they were unable to depend on their parents’ care and/or protection. These children were apt to develop insecure patterns of attachment, which would follow them through life and possibly serve as the beginning of numerous other developmental problems (Bowlby, 1969).

After being introduced to the ideas put forth in Bowlby’s attachment theory, Mary Ainsworth (1979) began to look further into infant-mother attachments during the first year of life. Through the use of her “Strange Situation” assessment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), which she developed to observe and assess parent-child attachments, Ainsworth was able to expand greatly on Bowlby’s (1969) original attachment theory.

In the Strange Situation assessment, which is still used today due to its great success, the goal is to assess the pattern of parent-child attachment by observing the child’s reactions to the “strange situation” he or she is placed in (Ainsworth et al., 1978). In this now classic behavioral assessment, a caregiver (generally a mother) and an infant enter an unfamiliar room with a

variety of novel toys. They are left alone and the infant is given the opportunity to explore the room. After a short time, a stranger enters, talks to the mother, and then attempts to engage the child in play. During this time, the mother leaves the room, leaving the child alone with the stranger. After a short time, the mother is reunited with the child and comforts him or her if necessary as the stranger leaves the room. Once the child is settled and has returned to play, the mother withdraws to a chair in the room. After a short time, the mother once again leaves the room and the stranger returns. The stranger comforts the child if needed and then withdraws to a chair in the room. The mother is then reunited with the infant a second time. The stranger once again leaves the room and the mother comforts the infant and then withdraws to the chair in the room as the infant returns to play (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Throughout the Strange Situation assessment, observers watch how the infant interacts with the caregiver, how he or she handles the separation from said caregiver, how the child explores the area, and how the child reacts to the stranger. The infant's attachment to his or her caregiver is then classified "according to the patterning of their [the infants'] behaviors" (Ainsworth et al., 1978, p. 45). The classification system used for the infants "reflects the organization of behavior in relationship to the mother," and classifies the infant's attachment pattern as either secure, insecure-resistant/ambivalent, or insecure-avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978, p. 45).

In the Strange Situation assessment, children who are securely attached to their caregivers use them as a secure base from which to explore their environment. These children are confident that their caregivers will be "available, responsive, and helpful should [they] encounter adverse or frightening situations" and therefore are bold and confident in their explorations and only return to their caregivers when comfort is necessary (Bowlby, 1988, p. 124). During the

Strange Situation assessment, securely attached children will engage with the stranger when their caregiver is present, will show distress when their caregiver leaves, and will be happy when their caregiver returns. This type of attachment, which is considered the healthiest form of attachment, is promoted within the first years of life by caregivers who are readily available to their children, caring and responsive to their children when they seek comfort, and sensitive to their children's needs (Bowlby, 1988).

Children who have insecure-resistant/ambivalent attachment patterns are unsure of whether or not their caregivers will be available and helpful when needed. These children have learned that their caregivers are undependable or inconsistent in their care and are often clingy and suffer from great separation anxiety (Bowlby, 1988). During the Strange Situation assessment, these children are resistant to exploring their surroundings, instead choosing to stay close to their caregivers, and they will not engage with the stranger even when a caregiver is present. When their caregivers leave, these children show great distress; however, they tend to be ambivalent about the caregiver's return and will seek physical closeness while also showing resistance to the caregiver's attention or attempts to comfort them. "Conflict is evident" in this form of attachment, and this may be "promoted by a parent being available and helpful on some occasions but not on others" or by a parent threatening to abandon a child as a way to emphasize control (Bowlby, 1988, p. 124).

In Ainsworth's third and final pattern of attachment, insecure-avoidant, children are taught to believe that if they seek care, the caregiver is more likely to deny them the help than to provide it (Bowlby, 1988). During the Strange Situation assessment, children with this style of attachment are likely to avoid and/or ignore their caregiver, as well as the stranger. These children seem unconcerned when the caregiver leaves or returns and it is unlikely that they will

explore the room much whether the caregiver is present or not. This style of attachment is “the result of the individual’s mother constantly rebuffing him” (Bowlby, 1988, p. 125). Whereas children with secure attachment patterns have learned that their caregivers will be there when they’re needed, children with insecure-avoidant attachment patterns have come to understand that when they ask for comfort or protection they are unlikely to get it, as their caregivers are likely to reject their signals for help (Bowlby, 1988).

After Ainsworth clearly established these three early parent-child attachment patterns using her “Strange Situation” assessment (Ainsworth et al., 1978), a number of researchers became interested in how these patterns of attachment could affect people later in life. Researchers (e.g., Bretherton & Waters, 1985) discovered that the quality of an early parent-child attachment could predict aspects of a child’s functioning years later. Other researchers (e.g., Belsky & Nezworski, 1988) found that unhealthy, insecure childhood attachments could lead to a number of negative long term effects, such as conduct problems, emotional disorders, and relationship issues.

As researchers became increasingly interested in how attachment patterns carried from childhood into adulthood, a number of researchers created theories which stretched attachment theory across the lifespan. Like Bowlby (1988), these researchers and theorists (e.g., Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988) held the opinion that a person’s attachment style remained relatively stable from childhood to adulthood, as it was believed that it was perpetuated through the individual’s internal beliefs. Thus, if a person is securely attached as a child, he or she learns to feel lovable and capable, and comes to understand that others are trustworthy. In turn, these beliefs maintain a secure attachment style into adulthood. With this idea in mind, theorists began creating classification systems for adult attachment, many of which were based on Ainsworth’s

early parent-child attachment patterns. For example, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) created a classification system for adult attachment in which they expanded Ainsworth's three attachment patterns into four categories, secure, preoccupied, dismissing and fearful. In addition, Hazan and Shaver (1987) used Ainsworth's three patterns of attachment to describe adults' romantic relationships, as they found that her original three categories could effectively be expanded from childhood relationships into intimate adult relationships.

As stated earlier, since Bowlby's (1969) original work on attachment theory, there has been a plethora of research done on the topic. As evidenced by a number of the works cited above (Bretherton & Waters, 1985; Belsky & Nezworski, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), much of this work has focused on exploring how early attachment carries into adulthood and affects people later in life. The remainder of this paper will discuss this line of work by looking at how early parent-child attachment patterns affect social adjustment and friendships in young adulthood.

Chapter 3

Effects of Attachment on Young Adults' Social Adjustment and Well-Being

As discussed earlier, Bowlby, along with a number of other researchers (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988) believed that an individual's early attachment patterns would continue through life and that these early experiences could greatly affect later life. They believed that early experiences with attachment helped form internal working models of the self and others, which, once formed, were relatively stable over time (Colin, 1996). These working models included feelings, beliefs, expectations of the self, others and the world, behavioral strategies, and "rules for directing attention, interpreting information, and organizing memory" which

would “have long-lasting consequences for personality development and...close relationships” (Colin, 1996, p. 19-20)

For example, people who experienced secure attachments early in life were likely to learn early on that they were socially competent and loveable, that the world was a safe place, and that others were reliable. These beliefs would remain with them throughout life. On the other hand, people who did not have the benefit of having a secure parent-child attachment were likely to have a very different view of themselves and the world and carry around a very different set of beliefs and expectations. These people may view themselves as not worthy of love, see the world as unpredictable, view others as unreliable, and be very anxious or avoidant about forming close relationships later in life.

As these ideas illustrate, a person’s early parent-child attachment patterns can have a great affect on a number of different aspects of a person’s life far beyond the childhood years when the attachment patterns were formed. With that in mind, this chapter will discuss how early parent-child attachments can affect social adjustment and well-being in young adulthood by reviewing the relevant research.

A number of researchers have sought to discover how early attachment patterns are linked to social adjustment and well-being in young adulthood, with the hypothesis being that those with secure early attachment patterns would be better adjusted and have a greater sense of well-being than those with insecure early attachments. Many of these studies used college students as their subjects, as this is an easily-accessible young adult group. However, studies using other young adult groups have been included in this discussion in an attempt to gain a

fuller picture of the connection between attachment and social adjustment and well-being during young adulthood.

One such study was completed by Gunvor Andersson (2005), who used a longitudinal design to follow a group of people in Sweden from before the age of 4 to the ages of 20-25. He looked at the effects of early attachment on later well-being and social adjustment, as well as later parental relationships and perceptions of family. The group of children in his study were all placed in foster care before the age of 4, which is how they came to Andersson's attention, and follow-ups were done with them 5, 10, 15, and 20 years later. Andersson assessed the children's early parent-child attachment patterns, and after following up with his subjects during young adulthood, grouped them into three categories: (1) those with "good" social adjustment and well-being; (2) those with "moderate" social adjustment and less well-being; and (3) those with "bad" social adjustment and well-being (those involved with drugs, criminal behavior, and/or showing antisocial behaviors). Andersson found that the young adults who, through interviews and testing, were categorized as having "good" social adjustment and well-being were more likely than those in the other categories to have had secure mother-child attachments early in life and to have remained in positive relationships with their mothers throughout life. They also showed secure patterns of attachment in other relationships in their lives, suggesting that their secure early attachment patterns did in fact follow them through life, as Bowlby (1988) believed. While those who were well-adjusted were more likely to have had secure early attachments, Andersson (2005) found that those who were classified as having "moderate" adjustment and less well-being were more likely than those in the "good" group to have been assessed with insecure mother-child attachments early in life. He also found that the young adults who fell into the

“bad” adjustment and well-being category were likely to have had “mixed earlier relationships,” which resulted in “inconsistencies in attachment patterns” (Andersson, 2005, p. 53).

As Andersson’s (2005) study illustrates, early attachment patterns can greatly affect young adults’ social adjustment and well-being. However, since his study was done on a very small, specific sample, it is important to look further into the large amount of literature available regarding attachment and its effects on social adjustment and/or well-being (e.g., Love & Murdock, 2004; Vivona, 2000; Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004; Kenny & Perez, 1996). Not all of this literature specifically assesses early attachment patterns and their later effects, as to track these variables, expensive and time-consuming longitudinal studies would have to be completed. However, as it has been shown that attachment patterns remain relatively stable throughout life (Bowlby, 1988; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988; Colin, 1996), some studies discussed here will look at attachment patterns in adolescence and young adulthood, with the assumption that these patterns were originally formed in parent-child relationships early in life and have been carried through the lifespan, while others will have assessed early parent-child attachments retrospectively.

Love and Murdock (2004) completed a study with a large, ethnically diverse sample of American college students from intact families and stepfamilies to study the differences in attachment patterns between these two groups and to figure out how these attachment patterns factored into the young adults’ adjustment and sense of well-being. These researchers knew from previous work that individuals from stepfamilies, compared to those from intact families, tended to fare worse emotionally, socially, physically, and psychologically (Amato & Keith, 1991). Working from the rationale that young adults from stepfamilies would have less secure attachments, they hypothesized that these less secure attachments were the reason that those from

stepfamilies were generally less well-adjusted. Love and Murdock (2004) found that there were indeed significant differences between the attachment patterns of young adults from intact families and stepfamilies, with those from stepfamilies reporting having had more insecure parent-child attachment patterns. They also found that attachment played a significant role in the variance of well-being between those in intact families and stepfamilies. Their results confirmed that parent-child attachment was a significant predictor of well-being in young adults, and that the differences in attachment patterns between family types could help explain why those from intact families were generally better adjusted than those from stepfamilies. This study supports the idea that early attachment patterns do indeed have an effect on young adults' adjustment and sense of well-being, just as Andersson's (2005) study did. However, as this study was completed using a sample of U.S. college students from mainly middle to upper-middle class homes, these results may not be generalizable to young adults from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

While the results discussed above may not be generalizable to all young adults, another study drew similar conclusions regarding the connection between early attachment patterns and young adults' well-being and social adjustment (Armsden and Greenberg, 1987). Using a sample of American college students, Armsden and Greenberg (1987) looked at how the quality of parental and peer attachments related to the well-being of those in late adolescence and young adulthood. As they predicted, the quality of parental and peer attachments in late adolescence and young adulthood was highly related to well being, particularly self-esteem and life satisfaction, and that even when the quality of peer relationships and negative life changes had been controlled for, the quality of parental attachments still had a significant effect on well-being (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). They also found that these attachments predicted young adults' scores on depression, anxiety, resentment and alienation scales, all concepts which are related to

social adjustment and well-being, with insecurely attached individuals scoring higher on these scales than those with secure attachments.

A study by Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006) came to conclusions similar to those of Andersson (2005) and Armsden and Greenberg (1987) regarding attachment, adjustment and well-being. This study looked at a sample of international Chinese and Taiwanese college students to see how their attachment patterns would affect their psychosocial adjustment and acculturation to U.S. culture. They found that high attachment anxiety and high avoidance, both issues created by insecure attachment patterns, were significant predictors for adjustment difficulties and psychological distress.

Another study, completed using a large sample of socio-economically diverse black and white adolescents in the U.S., discovered that adolescents with a history of secure parent-child attachments tended to be better adjusted and more able to regulate their emotions than those with insecure attachments (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998). This was found to be true across both gender and racial groups, with one exception regarding gender. Cooper et al. (1998) found that females with insecure-resistant/ambivalent patterns of attachment had higher levels of depression and anxiety than females with other attachment patterns, as well as all males.

There have been an abundance of studies done on the issue of how early attachment patterns affect social adjustment and well-being later in life. These studies show us that secure attachment patterns lead to better adjustment and higher levels of well-being in young adulthood than insecure attachment patterns. For example, in a study using a diverse sample of American college students, Kenny and Perez (1996) found that secure parent-child attachments were linked to higher levels of psychological well-being in their subjects. A few years later, using a sample

of Canadian college students, Soucy and Larose (2000) came to a similar conclusion when they found that young adults with secure attachment styles were better adjusted than those with insecure attachment styles. However, despite the abundance of research on this topic, there is still work to be done. Very few studies mention whether these patterns of attachment, social adjustment and well-being are experienced differently based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, and/or other cultural aspects. In addition, the majority of these studies were completed using U.S. college students as subjects. Therefore, while it is clear that early attachment patterns significantly affect social adjustment and well-being in young adulthood, it is also clear that if we are to gain a fuller understanding of how early attachments affect young adults' well-being and social adjustment, further research must be done. Research using subjects from diverse backgrounds, as well as subjects active in contexts other than the university, such as the military, the workplace and places of worship, would greatly benefit this area of study. In addition, studies completed outside of the U.S. would also provide us with a broader understanding of how early attachments influence well being and social adjustment later in life.

Chapter 4

Effects of Parent-Child Attachment on Friendships in Young Adulthood

Although attachment theory and the effects of parent-child attachments later in life are widely studied subjects, there are still some areas of interest regarding these topics that lack a significant amount of research. While numerous researchers and theorists have studied how attachment patterns affect romantic relationships later in life (e.g., Simpson, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005), with the notion that romantic relationships are most closely related to parent-child attachments as far as caretaking behaviors

are concerned (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), very few have taken the time to look at how parent-child attachment patterns affect friendships and peer relationships in young adulthood and beyond.

This topic seems to have been overlooked by all but a few, despite the fact that prominent attachment theorist Mary Ainsworth (1989) theorized that some friendships may qualify as affectional attachment bonds due to their closeness and endurance. This chapter will provide an overview of the work that has been completed regarding the effects of parent-child attachments on friendships and/or peer relationships during young adulthood.

Research in the area of attachment and friendships has been growing, particularly due to the acknowledgment that the central relationship in an individual's life is often a friendship when there is not a romantic partner present (Welch & Houser, 2010). With that in mind, Fraley and Davis (1997) sought to discover how attachment factored into young adults' close peer relationships. Using a sample of American college students, they found that among non-dating participants it was common for attachment-related functions to be transferred from parent-child relationships to friendships, if the friendships were characterized by mutual caring, support, trust and intimacy. They also found that participants who used a best friend as an attachment figure were more likely to have a secure working model of attachment. On the other hand, those with avoidant models of attachment were less likely to have formed a close friendship bond, which indicates that insecurely attached young adults may be more reluctant to form close attachments with their peers. This demonstrates that parent-child attachment patterns do affect the formation of close friendships in young adulthood.

Another study done by Grabill and Kerns (2000) supports the same conclusion. This study, also completed using American college students, looked at how attachment styles in young adulthood are related to intimacy in friendships. Grabill and Kerns (2000) discovered that

young adults with secure attachment styles were more likely to self-disclose, to respond when others self-disclosed to them, and to feel understood, validated, and cared for by others, than those with insecure attachment styles. These results suggest that individuals with insecure attachment styles are lacking in the general characteristics needed to develop intimacy in friendships, while those with secure attachment patterns developed these necessary skills earlier in life, most likely through secure attachments with their parents.

While the study by Grabill and Kerns (2000) clearly shows that young adults' attachment styles play a role in helping (or hindering) them develop intimate friendships, it also found that intimacy in friendships varies based on gender. They found that women generally have more intimate friendships with those of the same gender than do men. Women are more likely to self-disclose, to respond when others self-disclose to them, and to feel that others are responsive to them, results which are consistent with previous research on gender differences in friendship (e.g., Sherrod, 1989; Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985). These gender differences are likely due to the differences in male and female gender socialization, and are most likely not related to attachment styles.

Parade, Leerkes, and Blankson (2010) drew conclusions similar to those in the two studies discussed above regarding the effects of parent-child attachments on friendships in young adulthood. In their study, American college students who reported secure parent-child attachments at the beginning of their first year of college generally had better friendship outcomes at the end of their first semester. They found this to be true among both white and minority students. Parade et al. (2010) also found that those with secure parent-child attachments formed friendships more easily, most likely because these young adults were more comfortable

seeking out new relationships due to their positive experiences in secure attachments with their parents.

While secure parent-child attachments helped both white and minority students make friends more easily, Parade et al. (2010) found that these secure attachments also predicted social anxiety and satisfaction within friendships, but only for minority students. As this study was completed at a predominately white university, the minority students may have experienced higher levels of stress than their white counterparts due to perceived racism. This in turn, may have activated the parent-child attachment more strongly, which would explain why attachment security predicted both social anxiety and friendship satisfaction, as well as why the total effect of attachment security on ease of forming friendships and satisfaction within friendships was more than double for the minority students as compared to the white students.

Unfortunately, the study completed by Parade et al. (2010) used only female participants, so these findings cannot be extended to men of this age group, as there may be gender differences. However, despite the solely female sample, this study provides evidence that parent-child attachments affect young adults' friendships, while also demonstrating that race, ethnicity, and context affect how, and to what degree, peer relationships are influenced by parent-child attachments.

Yet another study, completed by Saferstein, Neimeyer, and Hagans (2005), makes it clear that early parent-child attachments can affect how young adults experience close friendships and peer relationships. This study was completed using a sample of American college students. Saferstein et al. (2005) found that young adults with secure parent-child attachment patterns experienced lower levels of conflict with friends, were more likely to be able to work through

difficulties in friendships, and had higher levels of companionship and security in relation to their best friend than young adults with insecure attachment styles. As attachment patterns are developed early in life in parent-child relationships, these results provide further evidence that parent-child attachments influence how young adults experience friendship.

As in the study done by Grabill and Kerns (2000), Saferstein et al. (2005) also found gender differences in the way young adults experienced close friendships. Compared to men, women generally had higher levels of companionship, protection and closeness with their best friends. Men, on the other hand, tended to experience greater aid, security, and help in same-sex friendships than in opposite-sex friendships, which was not true for women. In addition, in some instances, gender and attachment style seemed to interact in influencing how a person experienced a friendship. Young adults with insecure attachment patterns experienced more conflict in opposite-sex friendships than same-sex ones, and had lower levels of security in these relationships as well. Securely attached individuals, on the other hand, experienced the same quality of friendship in both same-sex and opposite-sex friendships. As this study indicates, parent-child attachment style may interact with other factors in young adults' lives and affect how they experience friendships in a number of ways.

While it is clear from the studies discussed above that parent-child attachments have an effect on friendships and peer relationships in young adulthood, this area of study would greatly benefit from more research. While the studies discussed in this chapter provide a first look into this area of research, further work needs to be completed, as there are a number of limitations in these current studies that need to be worked through. For one, all of the studies discussed above were completed using samples of American college students, most of whom were white. To be able to draw broader conclusions regarding the effects of parent-child attachments on friendships

in young adulthood, research needs to be done using subjects from different cultural backgrounds (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, nation of origin, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religion, etc). In addition, research needs to be conducted in contexts other than universities, such as the military and the workplace, as context may play a role on how attachment affects friendships, as we saw in the study done by Parade et al. (2010). This area of research would also benefit from studies completed outside the U.S., as all of the current studies were done in the United States. Since this is a reasonably new area of study, further research also needs to be done to see if the results of the studies discussed above can be replicated in order to confirm their reliability. Hopefully, this area of research continues to expand and provide a further understanding of how early parent-child attachments affect how young adults experience friendships and peer relationships.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Throughout the years, numerous researchers have completed work exploring attachment theory and the long-term effects that early parent-child attachments have on people's lives and relationships. This research has found that early attachment patterns extend across the lifespan and affect a variety of different aspects in people's lives. With this in mind, this paper sought to provide an overview of the research currently available regarding the effects of early parent-child attachments on the well-being, social adjustment, and friendships and/or peer relationships of young adults.

According to the literature reviewed, early parent-child attachments have a strong effect on young adults' well-being and social adjustment. Research shows that young adults with a

history of secure attachment patterns are generally better socially adjusted and have a stronger sense of well-being than young adults with a history of insecure parent-child attachments.

In addition, research also shows that parent-child attachments have an effect on young adults' friendships and peer relationships, although there were a variety of different conclusions drawn as to how friendships were affected. It was found that young adults with secure attachment styles were more likely than those with insecure attachment styles to self-disclose and respond when others self-disclosed, which led them to develop closer, more intimate friendships, although intimacy levels did vary based on gender (Grabill & Kerns, 2000). Furthermore, when compared to young adults with insecure attachment patterns, those with secure attachments were better able to work through conflicts with friends, had lower levels of conflict in friendships, and had higher levels of companionship and security with their best friends, although these things also varied by gender (Saferstein et al., 2000). In addition, researchers found that those with secure parent-child attachments had an easier time making friends; however, this was concluded using a completely female sample and therefore cannot be extended to young adult men without further research (Parade et al., 2010). Clearly, early attachment patterns do affect young adults' friendships and peer relationships; however, it is also clear that more research needs to be conducted on this topic.

While there is an abundance of research available regarding the effects of early parent-child attachments on young adults' well-being and social adjustment, there is a very small amount completed regarding the effects of attachment on young adults' friendships and peer relationships, which is something I would like to see change. Most of the research regarding the effects of early attachments on later relationships has been focused on romantic relationships. Researchers have only recently begun to look more closely at how young adults' friendships are

affected by early attachments as well. As this is a subject that has only recently begun being studied, more research is needed to provide us with a further understanding of this topic and to confirm the reliability of the conclusions drawn by the studies discussed in Chapter 4. In addition, research using young adults from diverse backgrounds (gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, nation of origin, etc) is also needed, as these aspects may influence how parent-child attachments affect later friendships and/or how friendships are experienced in young adulthood. The issue of how early attachment patterns affect well-being and social adjustment in young adulthood would also benefit from the completion of more research using subjects from diverse backgrounds, although as this subject is more widely studied than that of early attachments and later friendships, some studies have been completed using diverse samples in the past.

In conclusion, it is clear from the literature reviewed in this paper that early parent-child attachments do affect the well-being, social adjustment and friendships of young adults. However, it's also apparent that further research, particularly regarding the effects of parent-child attachments on friendships in young adulthood, would benefit this area of study greatly. Hopefully, researchers remain interested in looking into parent-child attachments and their long term effects on well-being, social adjustment and friendships, as further work would provide us with a much better understanding of these subjects.

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